

Message Text

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17

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 EA-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 IO-14 OMB-01 ACDA-19 SAJ-01 DRC-01 /147 W

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R 240854Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3258

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 3146

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, AS

SUBJ: UK DEFENSE CONSULTATIONS WITH AUSTRALIA

REF: SINGAPORE 2217

1. SUMMARY: BRITISH MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENSE WILLIAM RODGERS MET WITH PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM AND MINISTER FOR DEFENSE BARNARD MAY 22. RODGERS EMPHASIZED HE HAD COME TO LISTEN, NOT TALK, AND MADE CLEAR NO BRITISH DECISIONS MADE AS YET ON DEFENSE COMMITMENTS, THOUGH OBJECT IS TO SAVE "HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF POUNDS" IN DEFENSE EXPENDITURE. BOTH WHITLAM AND BARNARD EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR FPDA AND SAID WOULD REGRET ITS DEMISE. WHITLAM SAID HE UNDERSTOOD REASONS BRITISH MAY FIND IT NECESSARY TO WITHDRAW FORCES FROM FPDA. NO PUBLIC STATEMENT AT END OF TALKS. END SUMMARY.

2. DEFENSE CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN UK MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENSE WILLIAM RODGERS AND AUSTRALIAN LEADERS (PRINCIPALLY PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM AND MINISTER FOR DEFENSE BARNARD) HALD MAY 22 DURING RODGERS' 24-HOUR STOPOVER IN CANBERRA. COUNSELOR OF BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION (BARDER) REVIEWED HIGH POINTS WITH EMBOFF MAY 24.

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3. BARDER NOTED THAT AUSTRALIANS HAD INITIALLY RESISTED SCHEDULING CONSULTATIONS AT THIS TIME, AS RESULTS OF AUSTRALIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS OF MAY 18 NOT YET CLEAR, AND THIS IS AWKWARD TIME FOR AUSTRALIANS. HOWEVER, RODGERS COULD NOT COME AT ANY OTHER TIME BEFORE MID-JUNE, WHICH WOULD BE TOO LATE TO HAVE CONSULTATIONS BROUGHT TO BEAR ON DEFENSE REVIEW EXPECTED TO BE CONCLUDED WITH PUBLICATION OF WHITE PAPER AROUND END OF OCTOBER. RODGERS EMPHASIZED, AS HE EVIDENTLY HAS DONE AT OTHER CAPITALS VISITED ON THIS TRIP, THAT HE "CAME TO LISTEN, NOT TO TALK." CANBERRA VISIT WAS LAST STOP ON TOUR.

4. RODGERS TOLD AUSTRALIANS HMG IS SEEKING TO SAVE HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF POUNDS ON VARIOUS UK COMMITMENTS, INCLUDING FPDA AND NATO. BRITAIN NEEDED TO COST COMMITMENTS AS WELL AS TO DETERMINE ATTITUDES OF ITS ALLIES. STARTING POINT WAS DECISION OF LAST BRITISH LABOR GOVERNMENT IN 1970 NOT RPT NOT TO MAINTAIN FORCES EAST OF SUEZ OVER LONG TERM. RODGERS SAID BRITAIN IS DETERMINED TO EMPHASIZE ITS CLOSE RELATIONS WITH U.S. AND NATO, MAKING CLEAR THAT OTHER COMMITMENTS ARE OF LESSER SIGNIFICANCE. HOWEVER, HE MADE CLEAR NO RPT NO OPTIONS HAVE BEEN CLOSED AT THIS TIME AND WHOLE RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES FROM MAINTENANCE OF ALL OF PRESENT TROOP COMMITMENTS DOWN TO TOTAL WITHDRAWAL EAST OF SUEZ WILL BE CONSIDERED.

5. AUSTRALIAN MINISTER FOR DEFENSE BARNARD TOLD RODGERS HE HOPED UK WOULD NOT RPT NOT WITHDRAW ALL OF ITS FORCES FROM FPDA. COMMENTING ON WITHDRAWAL OF AUSTRALIAN FORCES FROM SINGAPORE, BARNARD SAID AUSTRALIA DID NOT RPT NOT CONSIDER COMBAT TROOPS AS ESSENTIAL TO MAINTAINING FPDA. OF 150 AUSTRALIAN FORCES NOW IN SINGAPORE ONLY ABOUT 35 ARE CURRENTLY REQUIRED FOR PURELY AUSTRALIAN PURPOSES; BALANCE SUPPORT FPDA. BARNARD SAID THAT IF UK WITHDRAWS ITS GROUND FORCES FROM FPDA, AUSTRALIA WOULD FURTHER REDUCE ITS RESIDUAL DETACHMENT OF 150. BARNARD ADDED HE WOULD BE EXTREMELY SORRY TO SEE END OF FPDA. HOWEVER, HE MADE CLEAR AUSTRALIAN MIRAGE SQUADRONS AT BUTTERWORTH, IN NORTHERN MALAYSIA, WOULD STAY FOR TIME BEING AND EXPRESSED HOPE AT LEAST BRITISH NIMROD MARITIME RECONNAISSANCE UNIT WOULD STAY IN SINGAPORE. BARNARD EMPHASIZED VALUE OF MILITARY EXERCISES, SAYING HE HOPED BRITISH FORCES COULD EXERCISE IN AUSTRALIA AND AUSTRALIAN FORCES IN BRITAIN, AND THAT EXCHANGES OF PERSONNEL WOULD CONTINUE.

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6. PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM MADE MUCH THE SAME POINTS AS BARNARD, THOUGH HE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD REASONS THEREFOR. PRIME MINISTER SAID GOA FULLY SUPPORTS FPDA AND WANTED IT TO CONTINUE. WHITLAM IN PARTICULAR SAID HE COULD UNDERSTAND BASIS FOR WITHDRAWAL OF GROUND FORCES. RODGERS, THINKING ALOUD, WONDERED IF THERE WOULD BE ANY VALUE TO SETTING TIME TABLE FOR SCALING DOWN OF BRITISH FORCES AS MEANS OF IMPROVING ACCEPTABILITY OF CHANGE. AUSTRALIANS WERE EVIDENTLY NOT MUCH INTERESTED IN THIS PROPOSAL.

7. NO PUBLIC STATEMENT ISSUED AT END OF TALKS WITH
WHITLAM AND BARNARD. RODGERS MET PRESS BRIEFLY MAY 22, ON ARRIVAL
IN CANBERRA. MOST QUESTIONS RELATED TO WHETHER BRITISH WOULD
DISCUSS DIEGO GARCIA WITH GOA. RODGERS REPLIED, NOTING THAT HE
HAD COME TO LISTEN, RATHER THAN TO EXPRESS BRITISH POLICY. (WE
UNDERSTAND WHITLAM AND BARNARD DID NOT RPT NOT RAISE DIEGO
GARCIA WITH RODGERS.)
GREEN

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